

VZCZCXRO0782  
OO RUEHQU  
DE RUEHPU #0881/01 2881149  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 151149Z OCT 09  
FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0453  
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 2396  
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 0434  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 2109  
RUEHMT/AMCONSUL MONTREAL 0414  
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC 1473  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC  
RUCOWCV/CCGDSEVEN MIAMI FL  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000881

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR, DRL, S/CRS,  
INL FOR KEVIN BROWN, HEATHER WILD AND MEAGAN MCBRIDE  
INR/IAA  
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [EAID](#) [HA](#)  
SUBJECT: A MORE EFFECTIVE PARLIAMENT IS SIGN OF DEMOCRATIC  
MATURITY

PORT AU PR 00000881 001.2 OF 002

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A historically discredited legislature greatly improved its performance in the current parliamentary session by passing a record number of laws. For the first time in many years, many parliamentarians are considering presenting their candidacies for a second term. The professionalization of Parliament comes against the backdrop of emerging populism and increasing influence over the legislature. Popular confidence in Parliament has improved in 2009 as the legislative has shown signs of seriousness and maturity. END SUMMARY.

WHERE IS MY IMMUNITY?  
-----

¶2. (SBU) The Haitian Parliament, especially the lower Chamber, has historically been seen as incompetent and inefficient. The primary motivation for Parliamentarians to run for office was to receive immunity, use government resources for monetary gains (sometimes in illicit activities) and for political self-aggrandizement. Few elected officials seemed concerned with the work of parliament, and even fewer contemplated running for a second-term (about five percent are usually re-elected for a second term). Needless to say, Parliament's output remained dismal and the image it projected was even worse. Based on a Greenberg survey in June 2008, 74 percent of Haitian adults evaluated parliament negatively.

EXPERIENCE REQUIRED  
-----

¶3. (SBU) For the first time in recent history, a majority of the Lower Chamber is considering seeking re-election, and international observers expect up to 30 percent of the current Parliament will return following the next parliamentary elections (the law requires elections in November, but they will almost certainly be postponed to early 2010). Edgar Leblanc, head of the opposition party OPL, told PolCouns that 90 percent of deputies are likely to present their candidacies at the next election.

¶4. (SBU) The significance of having a critical number of deputies win a second term lies in the institutional

knowledge that is kept and the mentorship and continuity afforded to the new comers. Rather than having to re-establish procedures and get new members to actually show up to work (as unusual as it may sound), Parliament may for once continue to carry on its work fairly smoothly after elections are over.

(LAWS VOTED) SQUARED  
-----

15. (SBU) This is especially important given two important trends. First, a distinct sense of professionalism has taken root in Parliamentary work, thanks to attitudes of select members of Parliament and the leadership of the Presidents of the Chambers, Deputy Levaillant Louis-Jeune and Senator Kely Bastien. Louis-Jeune, for example, pushed for the impartial and competitive selection of a Secretary General at the Lower Chamber, in stark contradiction to the previous culture of political appointments. He is also encouraging the creation of an independent parliamentary civil service and is committed to having internal procedures applied consistently. A number of parliamentarians have aligned themselves with president Louis-Jeune's agenda for professionalizing the institution. Town hall meetings, during which parliamentarians respond to questions from their constituents, have become not only a campaigning tool, but also one by which parliamentarians are detaching themselves from their roles as local development agents and focusing on a national agenda by communicating Parliament's role to the population.

16. (SBU) Parliament has also exponentially increased its productivity during this legislature. In the first two and half years, Parliament passed 16 laws, compared to 14 laws passed solely in the past year. Several key initiatives were passed, including those on the minimum wage, constitutional amendments and the budget. The budget was approved on time before the beginning of the new fiscal year, a first and a surprise to many even inside government. At least in part as a result of Parliament's unusual productivity, President Preval convoked the Parliament to an extra-ordinary session on September 29th, putting 28 items on the agenda. By law, Parliament can continue working on these items until completion or until a new legislature is voted in.

NOT SO FAST  
-----

17. (SBU) However as the media and observers pay more attention to the legislative, parliamentarians are tempted to promote increasingly relevant populist proposals as launching pads for creating a national image for themselves (whether for future senatorial or presidential campaigns). Deputy Steven Benoit garnered popularity when he proposed a minimum wage law that did not take economic reality into account but that appealed to the unemployed and underpaid masses. Senator Rudy Heriveaux, seemingly in the footsteps of Benoit, has proposed a law capping both commercial and residential rent at an unprofitable rate. Both proposals have drawn negative feedback from foreign investors and the private sector alike, but have served their proponents' populist political image well.

18. (SBU) COMMENT: The increased productivity and the interest in returning on second terms are signs of democratic maturity. They contribute to legitimizing an institution long deemed irrelevant by the population and the political class. The same Greenberg survey mentioned above noted an improved perception of Parliament's performance between June 2008 and June 2009. Nonetheless, much remains to be done, given that the changes described above are characteristic of a core group only, and the attitudes prevalent in the majority in Parliament remain counter-productive. The next elections will determine to what extent this positive trend in Haiti's institutional development continues. With November elections almost

certainly delayed, the credibility Parliament is slowly  
building with voters may be eroded.  
LINDWALL